

Tabernacle Presbyterian Church  
3700 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-1099

HABS  
PA  
51 PHILA  
271-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240

## TABERNACLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

Location: 3700 Chestnut Street (Southwest corner of 37th and Chestnut Streets), Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Trustees of Tabernacle Presbyterian Church.

Present Occupant: Tabernacle Church - Presbyterian and United Church of Christ.

Present Use: Sanctuary, church school, church office & apartment.

Statement of Significance: The Tabernacle Church is a large Presbyterian Church of the late Nineteenth Century. It was built in the English Decorated Gothic Style and has fine exterior stone details and a functionally handsome interior.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Jan. 31, 1884.

Grantor	Grantee
John M. Van Harlingen & Esabella his wife.	The Trustees of the Tabernacle Presbyterian Church in the City of Philadelphia (17S8-11 Record of Deed, Philadelphia, Pennsyl- vania).

"...containing in front on Chestnut Street 119 feet 4 inches and of that width along the West side of 37th Street in depth Southward 220 feet 2 inches to Sansom Street formerly called York Street."

2. Date of Erection: 1884-1886.
3. Architect: Theophilus Parsons Chandler, Jr. (1845-1928).  
Superintendent of Construction: Oliver Bradin.  
Master Mason: Michael Scully.  
Architectural Carving: William Stewart, 129 S. Thirty-seventh St., West Philadelphia.  
Carpenter: James A. Bradin.  
Painting & Glass: J. Gibson.  
Heating: Exeter Machine Works.  
Organ: William King, 107 East Church Street, Elmira, N.Y.

Furniture: John Barber, 247 S. Third Street., Philadelphia.  
Light Fixtures: George Fries & Co., 909 Filbert Street,  
Philadelphia.

4. Original plans, construction, etc.: Construction bids indicate that the church was planned for alternate types of stonework and original drawings call for the organ to be placed in the chancel arch where it now stands rather than the balcony as first constructed. Otherwise the existing church is generally the same as originally planned.
5. Notes on alterations and additions:  
Prior 1931- Organ moved to balcony over narthex.  
c. 1931 - Organ moved back to chancel arch, with new face pipes; wooden reredos reused but moved forward to house organ pipes.  
1953 - New choir pews located to west of pulpit.  
1954 - New ceramic tile flooring in north narthex; chapel kitchen modernized.  
c. 1962 Toilet room added on Second Floor (West) of chapel.  
1965 - Repointing of stonework.
6. Important old views:
  - a. Five exterior photographs c. 1886-1915, and two interior photographs c. 1900 & 1920; property of Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
  - b. Two exterior photographs c. 1886-1900, property of Tabernacle Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
  - c. Illustration, "Doorway in Tower of Church at Thirty-seventh and Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania", American Architect and Building News 11/13/1886 Plate No. 568, opposite p. 231.

B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure:

1. Extract from Letter from S. W. Reeves (Ruling Elder, Secretary Building Committee) to Rev. McCook 4/28/86:  
"Dec 31/83 Lot 37th & Chestnut St. bought (Deed dtd. Jan 31. 1884)  
Jan 23/84 Committee on Plans appointed  
Apr 25/84 Plans of buildings adopted  
May 2/84 Building Committee appointed  
May 10/84 Ground broken for Building operation  
June 21/84 Church Broad & Penn Square sold  
Oct 30/84 Corner Stone laid  
May 29/85 The Manse occupied by the Pastor's family.

TABERNACLE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH  
HABS No. Pa-1099 (Page 3)

Sept 6/85 First Services in Chapel  
(Nov 16/85 Cap stone)  
June 17/86 First Services in Church

Cost of lot                      \$35,564.86  
Cost of Building                \$170,631.44 "

2. The Tabernacle Church was formed in 1873 by the union of two organizations, known as the Sixth and Seventh Churches. The Sixth Church was organized in the old State House in 1814, and occupied its fine brick edifice on Spruce Street, below Sixth, until the time of union.

The Seventh Church was organized in 1804, first as a Congregational Church, known as the Independent Tabernacle in Ramstead Court, then as a Dutch Reformed Church then in 1819 as the Seventh Presbyterian Church. In 1842 the congregation moved to the beautiful Grecian temple at Broad Street and Penn Square, which the united Tabernacle church occupied until moving to West Philadelphia.

The Pastor, Rev. Henry C. McCook, D.D., was installed January 18, 1870. He was pastor of the church until 1903 and was highly instrumental in the plans of the present church, besides being President of the American Entomological Society and Vice President of the Academy of Natural Sciences, and later President of the Presbyterian Historical Society. A meeting of the church and congregation in 1898 resulted in the National Relief Commission, which brought comfort to troops in the Spanish-American War.

In 1884, the membership of Tabernacle Church numbered 317. A peak membership of 849 was reached in 1896. By 1944 the membership had declined to 310 with the present membership at 350 members. The church services many persons of the University of Pennsylvania community as well as being active in the affairs of the Westminster Foundation since the 1950's. During the 1950's, the minister was located in a new manse in West Philadelphia, so that the manse structure could be used for offices and other activities.

C. Sources of Information:

Chandler, Theophilus P., Jr. (three original drawings), property of Tabernacle Presbyterian Church; 1. dated 1884 (Oct. 7) - organ chamber & altar arch; 2. 1884 (Nov. 25) - East elevation, section through east wall, side elevation of East Transept; 3. 1885 (Aug. 30) - Transept and gallery plans.

Klett, Guy S., "A History of the Building of Tabernacle Presbyterian Church at 37th and Chestnut Sts..." October, 1944, a folder. Tabernacle Presbyterian Church.

On file at Presbyterian Historical Society, Witherspoon Bldg., Philadelphia, Pa.:

Letter from S. W. Reeves to Rev. McCook of April 4, 1886.

MS 213 - "General Description of Architecture"

"Opening Services in the New Tabernacle Presbyterian Church" (newspaper clipping c. 1886).

"Order of Ceremonies at Laying of Corner-Stone of the New House of Worship for Tabernacle Presbyterian Church ... Oct. 30, 1884"

"Order of Service for Dedication of the Tabernacle Presbyterian Church...on Sabbath, May 20 A.D. 1886."

"Tabernacle Presbyterian Church Year Book A.D. 1900."

Van Trump, James D. "The Gothic Fane: The Medieval Vision and Some Philadelphia Churches, 1860-1900" (Part I), Character, vol. 43, no. 9 (Sept. 1963), pp. 20-27.

White, Rev. Wm. P., and Scott, William H. The Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia - A Camera and Pen Sketch of Each Presbyterian Church and Institution in the City. Philadelphia: Allen, 1895, pp. 28-31.

Prepared by William B. Bassett,  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
August, 1965

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: This fine late nineteenth century structural group has an interesting disposition of church, chapel and manse with highly regarded sculptural detail and church interior.
2. Condition of fabric: Good; exterior stonework being repointed at present time as part of active refurbishing program.

### B. Technical Description of Exterior.

1. Overall Dimensions: Approximately fifty feet wide (east to west) by over one hundred feet long (north to south).

2. Foundations: Stone rubble and mortar, three to four feet thick.
3. Wall construction: Washington granite (grey) with Indiana Limestone trim for bearing walls with staged buttresses.
4. Porches, stoops, bulkheads, etc.: Arcaded cloister passageway on east between rear of church and manse (along east side of chapel); pentagonal porch on west side of manse.
5. Chimneys: Four-stage stone chimney in form of a pinnacle with crockets at southeast corner of chapel. Rectangular stone chimneys on east and south walls of manse, with datestone "1884" on east chimney.
6. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: Indiana limestone surrounds "gothic" oak panel doors.
  - b. Windows and shutters: Stained and colored glass windows in carved and moulded limestone frames. Casement windows in manse. McCook Memorial Window, first bay south of transept on east side, by Mayer & Co. Munich & London ("In filial memory of John McCook, M.D., and Catherine T. Sheldon McCook his wife").
7. Roof:
  - a. Shape, covering: Gable with pink slate (with elliptical end-fish scale) shingles.
  - b. Cornice, eaves: Indiana limestone with double-drip moulding graced by inscriptions and sculptural symbols for the figures of a lion (St. Mark), a bull (St. Luke), and an eagle (St. John).
  - c. Dormers, cupolas, towers: Pinnacled northeast corner entry and bell tower with limestone gargoyles in form of angels ("rampant") at three upper corners (Northeast, northwest, southwest). Stone pinnacle at northwest corner of church. An octagonal stone stair tower, (two stories high) with Gothic stone railing and octagonal roof. Two hipped dormers on south slope of manse.

C. Technical Description of Interior:

1. Floor Plans: The cruciform plan of the church is entered from the north through the bell tower on the northeast corner with a narthex across the north end of the church with a U-shaped balcony above. Doors flanking the chancel lead to rear vestibules which also service the Chapel structure south of the Church auditorium. The two-story high second floor chapel is flanked by interior balconies. The first floor of the chapel is a social room. An exterior arcade passage leads from the east rear vestibule to the two-and-a-half story manse on raised basement. The vestibule of the manse contains an open newel stairway to the second and third floors. Each floor of the manse consists generally of three rooms with a bay window on the east of basement and first floor. The main floor of the manse originally had two parlors, dining room, and pantry with the kitchen in the basement and bedrooms on the upper two floors.
2. Stairways:  
Church: Two enclosed single-run wooden stairways (18 risers each) from church narthex to church balcony; access off of balcony through east wall hatch to northeastern flower ladder; one direct run wooden stairway down 15 risers from narthex to basement.  
Chapel: West wooden access stairway to basement; east wooden stairway in stairtower from vestibule down to basement and up to former church office area and chapel.  
Manse: Open newel, wooden stairway from vestibule of manse to second floor offices and apartment above.
3. Flooring: Church has carpeting over wooden floor; ceramic tile in northeast and west vestibules.
4. Wall and ceiling finish:  
Church: Walls are white painted plaster; ceiling of exposed poplar roofing with a dark brown stained finish.  
Chapel: Walls are painted plaster (generally creme color); ceiling of exposed poplar roofing with a dark brown stained finish.  
Manse: Walls and ceilings are painted plaster (generally creme color).
5. Doorways and doors:  
Church: Decorated limestone trim incorporating verses from the Scriptures with decorated pointed oak panelled doors.  
Chapel: Decorated pointed oak panelled doors.  
Manse: Decorated pointed oak panelled doors stained and varnished.

6. Trim:  
Church: Balcony faces have wooden panelling with quatrefoils and wooden pinnacles at corners. Carved wooden angels carrying wooden plaques grace ends of hammer beams; oak tongue and groove wainscoting.
7. Hardware: Ornate wrought iron double door gateway at ground-level entrance to the church's northeast bell tower.
8. Lighting:  
Church: Electrical with twelve "gothic" (six-sided) hanging lamps in nave (replace original gas lamps and latter arrangement of single electric light bulbs.)  
Chapel and manse: Electrical.
9. Heating: Gas, forced hot air (originally coal).

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The West Philadelphia community borders the University of Pennsylvania campus. The structures fit tightly on the lot with the center line of the nave running north to south.
2. Enclosures: None.
3. Outbuildings: None.
4. Walks, driveways, etc.: Concrete walk from street sidewalk on north to entry at bell tower. Concrete steps and walk on east services east services east vestibule and manse. Small paved area south of chapel and west of manse.
5. Landscaping: A minimal amount of landscaping with grass covering unpaved areas.

Prepared by William B. Bassett  
Architectural Historian  
National Park Service  
August, 1965